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ABSTRACT

In order to demonstrate Walton J. Ong's continuing relevance to the field of rhetorical theory, a review of his intellectual contributions and development is conducted in three stages, covering not only Ong's books and major articles but also his Jesuit educational history and his reviews of other theorists. In the first period (1939-1950), Ong's involvement with New Criticism under the tutelage of Marshall McLuhan produces critical writings concerned with close textual analysis and (in opposition to New Criticism) an emphasis on the personal and historical context of the work. In the middle period (1950-1967), Ong's concern with the "shifting sensorium"--the move from a sound oriented noetic to a sight orientation--also originates with McLuhan, who introduced Ong to Ramus studies in 1939. This "aural-visile" approach to intellectual history diverges from the views of "traditional rhetoricians," as is evident in the debate between Ong and elocution theorist W. S. Howell, in which Ong's argument explains how elocutionism arose, paradoxically, out of the new subjugation of oral delivery to the inscribed word. In the third period (1967-present), Ong's work on the transformation of the word from orality, to literacy, to electronics, contributes to a common jargon for the issue of media shifts and the accompanying change in mental processes, with McLuhan, E. A. Havelock, and A. B. Lord reciprocal influences in Ong's orality and literacy perspective. The interdisciplinary, diachronic and metarhetorical aspects of Ong's career make him one of the prominent rhetorical theorists of the twentieth century. (JG)

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Ong

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Walter J.Ong's Perspectives

On Rhetoric

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Abstract

For the better part of 50 years, Walter J. Ong, S.J., has published works of interest to rhetoricians and communication scholars. His work has evolved into a phenomenological history of culture and consciousness, showing how rhetoric influences and is influenced by cultural developments. This study attempts to synthesize and interpret Ong's development in three stages: Ong as a literary theorist and critic (1939-1950); as a Renaissance scholar (1950-1967); on the transformation of the word from orality, to literacy, to electronics (1967-present). It is concluded that Ong's relevance to contemporary rhetoric lies in three areas: (1) he exemplifies "rhetorician" more than most; (2) his work reflects the current need for diachronic approaches to research; (3) his work serves as a metarhetoric.

Walter J. Ong's Perspectives

On Rhetoric

In an academic career spanning five decades, Walter Ong has consistently produced provocative work of interest to scholars in various fields. Rhetoric holds a distinct place in his theorizing, as evidenced by his division of Western history into two periods: the rhetorical age and the romantic age. He asks (1972a), "if rhetoric has the potential thus to divide all human history, how can it possibly be understood simply as a curriculum subject in our present sense of this term?" (p. 613).

Professor Ong (b. November 30, 1912; Kansas City), a Jesuit Priest, has authored nearly 400 works, consisting mostly of scholarly books, articles, and book reviews. The works are not confined to a limited amount of topic areas--he deals with anthropological, cultural, communication, literary, philosophical, psychological, sociolinguistic, and many other issues. The reader of Ong will find few radical shifts in his thinking. Especially since beginning research on the Renaissance savant Peter Ramus in the 1940s, Ong has been primarily concerned with tracing "the word" from its primary state in sound on to script, typography, and electronics. For Ong, the shifts in the way the word presents itself effects the perceptual and cognitive style of any given culture.

This essay will trace Ong's development through his early stage as a literary critic and theorist (1939-1950); it will then move on to his middle stage (1950-1967), highlighted by concern

with Renaissance rhetoric; and will conclude with discussion of his later stage (1967-present) in which the dynamics of the shifts from orality, to literacy, to electronics have received much attention. The paper will close with some judgements as to Ong's relevance to contemporary rhetorical theory.

Before getting into his work, some biographical information may be in order. He received his B.A. (majoring in latin) from Rockhurst College in 1933. From St. Louis University he received the Ph.L (1940); M.A. (1941, in English); and the S.T.L (1948). His master's thesis was on "Hopkins' Sprung Rhythym and the Life of English Poetry." From Harvard he received his Ph.D in 1955. His dissertation, the longest ever submitted at Harvard (1700 pages), became the 1958 released Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue, and the Ramus and Talon Inventory. He has held numerous university teaching positions, served on prestigious educational committees, and received many academic accolades.

As a teacher, Ong instructed English and French (1941-1943), was an assistant professor (1954-1957), and associate professor (1957-1959) of English at St. Louis University. His visiting professorships include stints at the University of California, Santa Barbara; Yale University; the University of Poitiers (France); Indiana University; New York University; McGill University; and the University of Chicago, among others. In 1973-1974 he gave 28 lectures, seminars, and videotaped interviews in Equatorial and West African countries. His topic was the evolution of communications from oral cultures to the electronic age. Currently he is William E. Haren Professor of English and

Professor of Humanities in Psychiatry at St. Louis University.

Ong's commitment to education has not gone unrecognized, as evidenced by his appointments to the National Fulbright Selection Committee for France (1957-1958); the White House Task Force on Education (1966-1967); the National Council on the Humanities (1968-1974); and the Rockefeller Commission on the Humanities (1979-1980). In addition, he served as President of the Modern Language Association (1978).

Academic accolades include stints as a Guggenheim Fellow (1949-1950; 1951-1952); Center For Advanced Studies Fellow, Wesleyan University (1961-1962); Center For Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences Fellow (1973-1974); and he held a Lincoln Lectureship, established to mark the 25th anniversary of the Fulbright-Hays Act (1974). He has received a myriad of honorary doctorates (biographical information from Contemporary Authors, New Revision Series, 4, 463-464).

Ong has never been studied in depth by rhetorical theorists. This may be because he often mixes the religious and secular, and he acknowledges the wall between the two (1959). Or perhaps it is because he is not a professor of rhetoric. Or, most likely, his musings on Ramist rhetoric in the 1950s may have typecast him as one concerned solely with Medieval and Renaissance rhetoric. Berquist, Golden, and Coleman (1978), in their popular The Rhetoric of Western Thought, cite Ong as a "specialist in ancient and medieval rhetoric" (p. 300), but neglect him in their section on contemporary trends. Since scholarship in ancient, medieval, and Renaissance issues does not command as much attention in our

journals and symposia as it once did (although it may be making a comeback), it stands to reason that one typecast that way could be "missed."

All this is not meant to imply that rhetoricians have ignored Ong. Reviews of his books are both numerous and favorable. W.S. Howell, responsible for two of the influential works on Renaissance rhetoric--Logic and Rhetoric in England, 1500-1700 (1956), and Eighteenth Century British Logic and Rhetoric (1971)--himself praised Ong's Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue (1958a). In his review appearing in the Quarterly Journal of Speech (1960), Howell claimed that the book was "for all Renaissance scholars in any subject . . . an event of the first importance in the advancement of their own studies and in the cause of sound learning generally" (p. 92). Another important twentieth-century rhetorician, Donald C. Bryant, in his QJS review (1972) of Ong's Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology (1971) wrote that "[Ong's] scholarly and critical fecundity over a wide range of interests is hardly to be matched, even by McLuhan or Northrop Frye" (p. 469). Contemporaries agree: Kathleen Hall-Jamieson's Philosophy and Rhetoric review (1984) of Ong's Fighting For Life (1981a) argued that "Ong's skillful synthesis of the literature in Biology, Sociology, Psychology, Philosophy, and Theology and the resulting banquet of inferences he invites us to sample commend the book to those set on answering the fundamental questions about the nature of human communication" (p. 180). Finally, Bruce Gronbeck's QJS review (1984) of Orality and Literacy (1982) posits that "[Ong] writes with the

bravado of a McLuhan and yet the analytical precision of an Aristotle. He must be read, especially by students of human communication" (p. 208).

The present effort attempts to get at the bases of some of the positions these critics find favorable. The paper does not pretend to be the final interpretation of Ong. Rather, it is an introduction to what will hopefully become a broader debate about the nature and relevance of Ong's work.⁽¹⁾

Early Career: Literary Theory and Criticism

Twentieth century rhetoricians have profited from studying the thoughts of influential literary critics. The "new criticism" movement originating in departments of English and Literature in the 1920s, and continuing up to the present, challenged the suppositions of the "old" criticism and its formulation of rhetoric. It is generally agreed that new critics helped form the basis for a "new" rhetoric. W. Ross Winterrowd, English professor with leanings toward rhetoric, has written that ". . . the English department side of the hall has developed far more interesting theories and procedures than has the speech side" (1973, p. 55). On the rhetoric side, Marie Hochmuth-Nichols' essays on Burke (1952) and Richards (1958) set a precedent for examining these and other theorists' output in an attempt to ascertain their relevance to issues confronting rhetorical scholars.

Professor Ong's early publications were conscious of the tenets of the new criticism. This was ironic considering his educational background, which was highly traditional and marked by

the "St. Louis Thomism" movement. The movement was initiated primarily by Jesuit fathers at St. Louis University who had argued that Renaissance interpretations of Thomistic thinking were inadequate. They attempted to go back to Aquinas' original latin works and arrive at fresh interpretations. In addition to Thomism, Ong studied Christian metaphysics, Jesuit founder Ignatius Loyola, and post-Renaissance scholasticism. How, then, was Ong exposed to the new criticism?

Ong and the New Criticism

Ong was introduced to the new criticism by Marshall McLuhan, who taught English at St. Louis University from 1937-1944. At the time of his arrival, McLuhan was completing his Ph.D work at Cambridge. He was brought to St. Louis by W.H. McCabe, S.J., Chairman of the English department and himself a Cambridge Ph.D. In a 1981 article, Ong reported interacting frequently with McLuhan during these years. McLuhan was both influenced by and had an influence on the intellectual milieu. Ong recalls that

anyone who knew the St. Louis University milieu in the late 1930s and early 1940s can recognize the continued presence of that milieu in McLuhan's later work. Younger faculty members and students in the very large Department of Philosophy focused a great deal of interest and discussion on noetic processes, and McLuhan's continued concern with the accumulation, storage, and circulation of knowledge, which matured in his media studies, owes a great deal to the St. Louis

University milieu. In The Gutenberg Galaxy dozens of passages echo the very wording that used to recur in our animated discussions (1981b, pp. 133-134).

Many of these discussions would occur in McLuhan's course titled "Rhetoric and Interpretation." The course dealt mostly with the nature of literary criticism, especially the new criticism.

In general, the new criticism frowned on older criticism's appreciatory nature, its inability to deal with metaphor on anything but a superficial level, and its misconceptions about the nature of rhetoric. New critics, led especially by F.R. Leavis, T.S. Elliot, and I.A. Richards, argued that a work of literature should be judged on its own merits, independent of the author. Prior criticism had insisted on studying the "classics." The new critics believed in the social and moral relevance of all literature and approached it with a sense of urgency. The critic should "attack" the work, using varied approaches.

Ong viewed the tenets of the new criticism as a jolt of fresh air for literary study. An early article (1939) indicates his dissatisfaction with his training in the appreciatory mode. In "the Meaning of the New Criticism" (1943), he applauded the new critics, especially Richards, for their revitalization of literary criticism. The significance of the new criticism, to Ong, was its success in moving literary theory out of the "wasteland of the Cartesian dichotomy" (p. 193).

Descarte, though himself not particularly interested in literary criticism, influenced generations of critics with his

notion of the "clear and distinct" idea. His application of mathematical models to abstract problems was hardly appropriate for literary study. Ong argued that critics operating within this framework were ill-equipped to deal with language on anything but a superficial level. Hugh Blair, for example, the prominent eighteenth-century British rhetorician whose Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres were the predominant rhetoric requirement for thousands of European and American students, looked at the tropes of rhetoric only as "adornment" or "dress" of ideas. When confronted with a metaphor, critics within this tradition found it difficult to discuss anything beyond how the figure aided in achieving "clarity."

In giving language more than a functional role, new critics were able to discuss how words influence the reader. If new critics followed one guiding rule, it would be that the critic should be intelligent, using varied approaches to arrive at the "total meaning" of a work. The new critic did not approach a literary work armed with a critical method ready to employ. Rather, the literary piece stood as an "object" which needed to be analyzed on its own terms, free of any authorial and critical biases.

Critical Writings

Although Ong was favorable towards the new criticism, he was never fully committed to it. He could not accept the premise that art must be treated as object--critics are mistaken if they think they can root out the "personalist deviation" in

literary criticism. ② Be that as it may, his earliest critical writings met the new critics' requirement that the critic discuss the moral and social relevance of literature. Even more noticeable in the early criticisms is the fact that, even though they are more "polemic" and "moralistic" in tone (reflecting his Jesuit training) than his later writings, they nonetheless reveal his early inclinations toward interest in literacy, culture, and the interaction between the two. This can be most readily discerned in his criticisms of Edmund Spenser (1942) and American comic books (1945).

In "Spenser's View and the Tradition of the 'Wild' Irish," Ong attempts to account for the irenic tone in Spenser's writing about the the Irish, even though he publicly supported the political climate which favored subjugation of the Irish. Prior explanations had argued that Spenser perhaps was a Machiavellian, or maybe was following the King's orders. Ong discounts these explanations on the grounds that they did not take into account the literary influences on Spenser--influences which had pointed out that the Irish deserved to be oppressed because they "lacked culture." The key to understanding Spenser is to recognize in his attitude a sense of cultural superiority. But, unlike his contemporaries, Spenser felt a kind of sympathy towards the Irish because he knew his culture was at one time "inferior." As Ong puts it,

in A View of the State of Ireland the difference between the Irish and English is again stated frankly in cultural terms. The English

themselves, before they had acquired culture, labored under the same vices as the Irish, so much so that it is impossible to say whether the Anglo-Irish who were Spenser's contemporaries were the victims of retrogression or of mere stagnation (p. 569).

Spenser followed in a long tradition of English writers who connoted "wild" Irish to mean lacking culture or "wanting art." Ong's essay is significant less for the insight it offers regarding Spenser as much as that it establishes some principles that would show up in much of his later work. First, the idea of cultural superiority, that one culture may consider itself superior to another largely because of linguistic practice, is one of his common themes. The Barbarian Within (1962a) is a direct descendent of studies like the one on Spenser. It discusses the "outsider" in history, individuals or groups of individuals who traditionally have been alienated because they did not speak the dominant language. The Greeks gave the label "barbarian" to anyone who was not cultured in the Greek lifestyle--which Ong argues meant especially not cultured in the Greek language. More recently (1983), Ong has shown how literate Americans react to non-literates as if the latter were "childlike." His reaction to this will not be surprising to one who has traced his thought: "This defensive, depreciatory interpretation of another culture by literates is itself curiously childlike" (1983, p. 136).

The influence of literacy on the human mind is another theme traceable to "Spenser." Although not explicitly stated, it is clear

that Spenser's British culture manifested behavior of a society more literate than the Irish. The Anglo-Saxon culture, evidenced by Spenser and others, was analytical to a point and capable of producing political treatises, philosophy, and other types of literature. The Irish, on the other hand, were less self-conscious and more group oriented--attributes of primary oral cultures that would be detailed in The Presence of the Word (1967) and Orality and Literacy (1982).

A final Ong tendency introduced in "Spenser" is his manner of studying a historical figure. What Spenser read, who he studied with, what he studied, occupations he held, etc. are all relevant to the analysis. But whereas the old style critic might discover the information and communicate it in an appreciative, biographical form, Ong is interested in how aspects of the author's life acted as forces on his thought processes. The same approach is used in the landmark work on Ramus (1958a), and in his most recent work dealing with Gerard Manley Hopkins (1986). The important point is that Ong is capable of making sweeping generalizations about culture and communication while at the same time producing some of the most detailed, intimate studies of individuals to be found in scholarly writing.

Similar tendencies appear in "The Comics and the Super State" (1945), a piece highlighting the moral and social relevance of comic books in American culture. On the surface, the comics reveal harmless characters which any "normal" child would find appealing. Getting below the surface, and writing at the tailend of World War II, Ong argues that American comics reflect a "herd"

mentality. Such a mentality encourages children to praise the "superman" figure who persuades not by reason, but by force. Notable about this study is the evaluative and moralistic tone:

The comic publishers' wares are in great part not devices for warming man's five wits but drugs which tend to induce intellectual anesthesia. Like other drugs, they can often build in the addict a false confidence while they are crystalizing the very habits which blunt his powers of perception. The rocketing popularity of the comics among servicemen under the abnormal strains of war is itself evidence of the qualifications of the comics as a soporific (p. 47).

Drug addict metaphors would noticeably decline in later writings. Early works, still under the shadow of the disputation-centered Jesuit training, were written more in a "good vs. evil" mode than later efforts. An introspective moment in Fighting For Life (1981a) acknowledges the fact that Jesuit education held on to the rhetorical tradition, characterized by verbal battle, longer than most educational institutions. He writes of the Saint Louis University School of Divinity in the 1940s that

in the basic courses instruction was by thesis method: one was presented with a series of theses covering the entire subject matter, taught by oral lecture what they meant, encouraged to argue orally about them formally and informally in order to show up any weaknesses or

ambiguities or misconceptions . . . and made to prove them orally and to defend them orally against any possible objections. In these agonistic basic courses . . . 'circles' or miniature disputations and large scale public disputations (the latter by selected outstanding students) were regularly held (p. 137).

It is thus somewhat easier to understand why Ong has been preoccupied with the rhetorical tradition and the nature of orality: in many ways, he was a product of that tradition.

The works on Spenser and the comics reflect well Professor Ong's early concerns in criticism. Although influenced by the new criticism, Ong never fully embraced its creed. New critics were a bit to "visualistic" to suit Ong's taste, taking the human person out of art and reducing it to "object." This interest in visualism, and its counterpart auralism, became major concerns of Ong's when he began delving into the topic of the next section, Peter Ramus and Renaissance rhetoric.

Middle Period: Ramus and the Decay of Dialogue

In the late 1930s McLuhan introduced Ong to Perry Miller's The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century (1939). In it, Miller examined the influence of Ramist dialectic and rhetoric on New England Puritans. Ramus had long puzzled Renaissance scholars who wondered why the French humanist, whose works revealed an average intellect at best, somehow managed to exert such a strong influence. In a 1971 interview, Ong recounted how even after reading Miller, he felt something was "missing" in analyses of

Ramism. But then,

. . . somehow I came across the difference between the Hebrew idea of knowing and the Greek idea of knowing and in that moment everything fell into place. I realized that though intellectual knowledge has likeness to all the senses, the Greeks were thinking of it more by analogy with seeing, whereas the Hebrews thought of knowing more as if it were hearing. We typically think of knowledge like the Greeks . . . The great axis in my Ramus work is the shift from an orally oriented culture to a visualist culture. Ramus bridges antiquity and modern technology because he intensified and accentuated the visualist element in verbal cognition. What made this possible for him was the printing press (Riemer, 1971, pp. 149; 151).

Thus the concern with the "shifting sensorium"--the move from a sound oriented noetic to a sight orientation--begins well before The Presence of the Word and Orality and Literacy. It actually begins in McLuhan's classroom.

Immediate Applications

Ong's excitement at his discovery led to publication of numerous articles examining intellectual history from the "aural-visile" perspective before the release of Ramus in 1958. For example, "Wit and Mystery: A Revaluation in Medieval Latin Hymnody" (1947), discusses medieval poetry in terms of its ties to the sound oriented, rhetorical world of the past. "Historical

Backgrounds of Elizabethan and Jacobean Punctuation Theory" (1944) argues that early grammarians, like Richard Mulcaster, George Puttenham, and others, ". . . conceives of the comma, colon, and period as marking off segments of discourse rather than as primarily making clear the sense, and these segments are those demanded by breathing and distinct utterance. Breathing comes first" (p. 355). He concludes that "the fact that man had to breathe had been a primary consideration at a time all discourse, in keeping with the rhetorical tradition, was conceived of as a thing spoken rather than written" (p. 360). Here, 14 years before Ramus and almost 40 before Orality and Literacy, the basis of the perspective was set. The contemporary Ong would argue that Elizabethan and Jacobean grammarians had not fully "interiorized" the technology of writing to the point of freeing themselves from oral practices. As the perspective developed, Elizabethan and Jacobean grammatical practice would be a prime example of "residual orality." In 1965, Ong defined oral residue as:

. . . habits of thought and expression tracing back to preliterate situations or practice, or deriving from the dominance of the oral as a medium in a given culture, or indicating a reluctance or inability to dissociate the written medium from the spoken. Such residue is not especially contrived and seldom conscious at all (p. 146).

Clearly, the grammatical practices described above meet Ong's later definition of oral residue.

Two more articles, "John Stuart Mill's Pariah Poet" (1950)

and "Fouquelin's French Rhetoric and the Vernacular Tradition" (1954), are good examples of approaches to intellectual history outlined more fully in Ramus and The Presence of the Word. The former addresses Mill's "retiring" of the poet from the oral-aural world, showing how Mill's dictum "eloquence is heard, poetry overheard," results from a sight oriented cultural noetic. The latter is an early explication of Ramistic influences in France. Many more articles could be discussed at this point (3) The point is that before the actual release of the major work on Ramus, Ong's perspective on the matter had already matured. Thus, Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue should not be viewed as the beginning of an "aural-visile" approach to intellectual history. It should be viewed instead as powerful support for an already established perspective.

Ramus, Howell, and Elocution

Rather than present an in-depth analysis of Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue, this section will present just enough of its argument to show how Ong's method of interpretation differs from W.S. Howell's. Howell is selected for comparison because he represents best the "traditional" rhetorician. By comparing the two interpretations, insight may be gained into the dynamics of Ong's perspective as well as show how two fine minds can encounter the same historical phenomenon and arrive at radically different conclusions.

In Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue (1958), Ong argues that Ramus' divorce of invention and disposition from

rhetoric was a result of an increasing tendency, traceable especially through medieval scholastic Peter of Spain and early humanist Rudolph Agricola, to play down the epistemic function of vocal speech. Since antiquity, knowledge had increasingly been thought of as something seen, a thought accentuated by script and then print. Ramistic "method" represents the extreme visualization of knowledge. To Ramus, any concept could be "methodized" simply by a process of dichotomizing. The concept would be halved, and then the halves halved, and so on. The result was volumes of books consisting of nothing but tree-like diagrams which were called "logical analyses" and, to the authors, represented truth. Ong call this "corpuscular epistemology"--a belief in a one-to-one correspondence between word, thought, and thing. Most recently, Ong has said that Ramistic method "was, in fact, a computer programming 'tree'--Ramus had the beginnings of computer software but no computer" (1987, p. 242).

Since Ramus' logic produced all knowledge necessary for the orator, rhetoric was reduced to a style manual. As Ong put it:

Ramist rhetoric is a rhetoric which has renounced any possibility of invention within the speaker-auditor framework; it protests in principle if not in actuality, that invention is restricted to a dialectical world where there is no voice but a kind of vision. By its very structure, Ramist rhetoric asserts to all who are able to sense its implications that there is no way to discovery or to understanding through voice, and ultimately seems to deny that the processes of person-

to-person communication play any necessary role in intellectual life (1958a, p. 289).

In Ramist rhetoric, "dialogue and conversation themselves become by implication 'mere nuisances'" (p. 289). Ramist rhetoric was extremely popular in Europe for the latter part of the sixteenth century, and much of the seventeenth. Ong's Ramus and Talon Inventory (1958b) lists 800-1100 titles of Ramus' works that were released before his popularity started to wane. His popularity resulted less from insights he offered into dialectical, logical and rhetorical processes, and more from the fact that his work was eminently teachable. In a later study (1961), Ong argued that Ramus' popularity in large part relates to its practical appeal to burghers and artisans. A good comparison would be the contemporary appeal of Dale Carnegie type courses to corporate white collar employees. The courses are not deep, but meet the pragmatic communicative need. Such was the lot with Ramus.

Ong's Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue was generally well received by Renaissance scholars and philosophers (i.e. Gilbert, 1959; Schoeck, 1960; Murdoch, 1961. These are three of the more in-depth reviews that serve as excellent summaries of Ong's work). Howell's Quarterly Journal of Speech review (1960) was also favorable, but it raised some key points of contention that may help explain why traditional rhetoricians might disagree with Ong. Howell is widely regarded as an authority on Renaissance logic and rhetoric. His Logic and Rhetoric in England, 1500-1700 (1956), released two years before Ramus, devoted several chapters to Ramus' reforms of dialectic and

rhetoric and the effect in England. Ong (1956) reviewed the book in Renaissance News, generally setting up justification for his soon to be released work:

. . . what is needed is a study of the moves whereby humanists of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries such as Rudolph Agricola . . . reoriented the highly quantified medieval logic stemming from the bete noire of Agricola and all the humanists, Peter of Spain . . . (p. 209).

Ramus, of course, would satisfy that need--or at least attempted to. Howell did not so readily buy the explanation. He had two major complaints with the book, both revealing a hesitation to accept the argument that Ramus represents a shift from knowledge as something heard to knowledge as something seen.

First, Howell argues that Ong cannot explain, except in a "vague" way, the sudden decrease in popularity of Peter of Spain's logic, and the sudden interest in Agricola's logic between 1515-1543. Also, why did Ramus supersede Agricola just as suddenly, and Descarte supersede Ramus? Ong's position, in general and much too briefly here, is that the successions relate to the shift from an auditory to a visual noetic--each writer reflected and appealed to the dominant trend of his time. Ramus especially appealed to the growing conviction after Gutenberg that knowledge was a "commodity," something packaged and sold like any other merchandise (Ong, 1961). Howell's explanation relies more on discussion of what historians, philosophers, and others have shown to be the forces at work. From that basis, he will argue that in

Agricola's time, ecclesiastic controversies resulted in the need for a logic of controversies that Peter did not provide. Ramus then "tidied up" the Agricola system, which entailed development of a theory for arranging arguments (his infamous "method"), and this refinement explains his popularity. Descarte then silences Ramus because "of a growing dissatisfaction with the old learning and because of a summons by Descarte for a logic of inquiry to replace the Ramist logic of communication" (p. 90).

Secondly, Howell does not accept the argument that rhetoric was left "muted and silent" as a result of Ramus' reform. He cites examples of the seventeenth century work of Louis Cresol and Michel LeFaucher on voice and gesture, plus the entire elocutionary movement of the eighteenth century, to show that

. . . the shift from the auditory to the visual was completely reversed, so far as rhetoric was concerned. It is hard to see how Ramist rhetoric could have caused oral delivery to perish of neglect, if even before the end of the Ramist era oral delivery suddenly begins to have more importance than it had ever enjoyed in the great classical rhetorics of Greece and Rome (p. 91).

It would appear that Howell may have misinterpreted the implications of the shift from an aural world dominated by rhetoric and a visile world dominated by print. Ong's analysis suggests that oral delivery in antiquity was something substantially different than elocutionary delivery--the latter a strategic choice by literates within a culture to make oral delivery the primary canon. Moreover, oral delivery for the

elocutionist was more concerned with pure entertainment than any figure in antiquity would allow. Thomas Sheridan, for example, one of the better known elocutionists, was an actor.

Professor Ong did eventually take on this issue of the elocutionary movement as reflecting a return to the oral-aural culture. In 1971, Howell released the sequel to the previously cited work, the sequel titled Eighteenth-Century British Logic and Rhetoric. In it, Howell detailed the developments in logic and rhetoric in England, paying particular attention to elocutionism and new rhetoric movements. Ong's Ramus book is not mentioned in the book, not even in a footnote.

In his review of the book for the William and Mary Quarterly (1972b), Ong devotes a little more than four pages to the elocutionary movement. He acknowledges that Howell has gone farther than any other to explain elocutionism, but

. . . one can discern additional patterns of development which he does not discuss and which carry the explanation even deeper . . . These patterns show how elocutionism arose, paradoxically, out of the new subjugation of oral delivery to the inscribed word, a subjugation begun with writing but maximized with print. Elocutionism was a symptom of a major readjustment in the entire noetic economy (p. 639).

Ong argues that the nature of elocutionary delivery differed significantly from the ancients. Eighteenth century elocutionists were concerned with improving reading aloud from texts. Ancient orators, on the other hand, did not read from texts but were

concerned with oral creation of a speech. That is why the topoi or "commonplaces" were so vital to the ancient orator: they provided lines of argument that had to be readily stored in the mind since there were few "texts" in our sense of term from which to retrieve information.

In addition, the elocutionary movement's interpretation of memory was different from the ancient's. The ancient orators never thought of memory as the verbatim recall of a prior written text. Rather, memory was characterized by "rhapsodizing," recalling information in thematic and formulaic patterns. For the elocutionists, memory was concerned with the verbatim recall of texts. Ong concludes that

the elocutionary movement, in short, shows in striking ways how the oral management of knowledge, threatened ever since the invention of writing, was by now thoroughly debilitated. (Romanticism would mark its virtual demise). By the close of the eighteenth century orality as a way of life was in effect ended, and with it the old time world of oratory . . . or rhetoric (p. 641).

Not only does Ong refute Howell's earlier claim that elocutionism represents a return to auralism, but actually presents it as one of the better examples of the shift away from the oral world. For similar reasons, Ong does not accept the contemporary revival of sound and oral delivery (especially in mass media) as a signal of a return to the older orality (i.e. 1967; 1982). Contemporary oralism, like the elocutionary movement, is too influenced by

writing and print to be anything like the oralism of the ancient world. This will become one of the major themes of Ong's later writings.

Later Writings: The Transformation of the Word

Prior to Ramus few scholars had addressed in as much depth the issue of media shifts and the accompanying change in mental processes. After that book Ong and others developed a relatively uniform language for the perspective, though not by strategic design. In Orality and Literacy he writes that "there is no 'school' of orality and literacy, nothing that would be the equivalent of Formalism or New Criticism, Structuralism, or Deconstruction . . . " (p. 1). Still, scholars working in the area have developed somewhat of a common jargon.⁽⁴⁾ For example, Ong had discussed in many places how writing becomes part of a culture's cognitive and perceptual apparatus without their conscious realization of such, yet McLuhan (1962) was the first to give the name "interiorization" to the process. Likewise, Ong had hinted at the dynamics of the primary oral world, but Lord's (1961) The Singer of Tales was the first to develop in systematic fashion the characteristics of pre-literate peoples. Additionally, Ong's work strongly implied that Plato's age was key as regards the shift from orality to script, but Havelock (1963) provided the definitive evidence of the occurrence. McLuhan, Lord, and Havelock remain major influences on Ong's work, though the influence is more mutual than anything else. All four were tackling similar areas simultaneously--reaching the same

conclusions on independent fronts. Still, Ong's reviews of the others' work provides insight into the formulation of his later positions.

On McLuhan, Lord, and Havelock

After McLuhan's departure from St. Louis University, his interest in noetic changes brought about by new media intensified, and by the late 1960s he had become somewhat of a celebrity. In the 1950s, when study of the history of communication started to gain momentum, McLuhan was instrumental in establishing the Canadian journal Explorations, interdisciplinary in nature and devoted to studies of issues involved in technological change.

McLuhan caught the public eye with The Gutenberg Galaxy (1962), in which he cites Ong's work frequently while further exploring the influences of typography on the human psyche. In a review for America (1962b), Ong argued that McLuhan's work was important because it exposed the misconceptions about typography--especially the ideas that typography merely allowed for multiplication of manuscript materials. To think of typography this way is to "think of a new invention in terms of what it supplanted, not in terms of what it is--as people used to do when they thought of the automobile as a 'horseless carriage'." (p. 747). Instead, writing must be thought of as effecting major changes in human behavior and consciousness--such as allowing individuals to "isolate" themselves from the tribe, making abstract thought possible, and creating a general belief that, of

the five senses, sight has the most affinity with knowledge.

Unlike other critics, Ong was not annoyed by McLuhan's non-academic writing style. Such might be the case because the two were friends, but one suspects the reasons cut deeper. McLuhan's writing, posited Ong, "is the result of a live realization of a truth which at least partially transcends immediate powers of utterance," and so will affect hearers in different ways:

Those whose antennae are as sensitive as McLuhan's will be overjoyed at his high degree of articulateness about a vast range of mysteriously linked cultural phenomena. Others, completely dominated by the habits of thought incident to the typographical society which McLuhan is standing off from and evaluating, will either be unable to make head or tail of what he is saying or reject it with some show of hostility (p. 747).

Ong here highlights the revolutionary nature of this line of thought, which still is approached (especially in attitudes toward McLuhan) with a "love it or hate it" mentality. For more critical reviews of McLuhan, the reader is led to the Summer, 1981 issue of the Journal of Communication, which is dedicated to the "living McLuhan," and includes essays tackling the major McLuhan controversial positions.

Ong is similarly favorable towards the work of Albert B. Lord. Lord is responsible for much of the existing knowledge on primary oral cultures, those with no knowledge of script and print. A student of the late Milman Parry, himself a professor of classics at Harvard who developed an oral theory of Homeric poems

based on his experience with preliterate bards in the South Slavic regions in the 1920s and 1930s, Lord took his mentor's ideas further and developed specific characteristics of oral cultures in his The Singer of Tales (1962).

Like The Gutenberg Galaxy, Ong thought the Singer of Tales to be seminal and revolutionary. This he points out in a review appearing in Criticism:

Typographically preconditioned minds, many of them, are likely to show themselves unsure and querulous in the presence of this and similar studies in which the landmarks they had been taught to take for granted are done away with as useless. The fact is that only with extreme difficulty can the oral performance which this book investigates be talked of at all meaningfully in our civilization, for the very concepts in which purely oral performance must be thought of are often missing from our minds, and contrary to our analytic habits (1962c, pp. 74-75).

Lord developed the definitive language with which to discuss the oral culture in as meaningful a manner as possible. Specifically, he is responsible for the identifying the thematic, formulaic, and traditional nature of primary oral culture discourse, aspects which become crucial to Ong's later theorizing.

Eric A. Havelock's Preface to Plato (1963) was one of the first works to take advantage of the Parry/Lord excursion into orality. He demonstrated how Plato's exile of the poet from his republic was in actuality a rejection of the oral culture in which

poets were not simply entertainers, but social and political necessities. They held the information the culture needed to maintain its ritual existence. Plato's celebration of oral discourse, specifically the Socratic dialogue, was a celebration of a specialized form of oratory made possible only by writing. Thus his condemnation of writing in the Phaedrus and the Seventh Letter was one of the great ironies in intellectual history: Plato's type of abstract thinking was only possible because of writing.

Ong viewed Havelock's findings as important for various fields, as pointed out in his Manuscripta review:

Havelock's thesis is a sweeping one and, on the whole, thoroughly convincing, tying in with the findings of an increasing number of recent psychological, historical, philosophical, and cultural studies. Literacy includes interiorization of the self, detribalization. In bringing out the self-discipline imposed by advance in civilization, the thesis of course parallels that of Freud in his Civilization and its Discontents, although it is infinitely better documented historically than Freud (1964a, p. 181).

Ong has referred to Havelock's work in many of his post-1963 writings. Preface to Plato is, arguably, a vindication not only of the Parry/Lord thesis, but also Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue. Just as Plato appears on the scene as a new technology was maturing, so Ramus appears when the wonders of moveable type were being realized. Both Plato and Ramus claimed to revere

oratory, and both did, but in a way touched by literacy. Havelock has pursued this type of thought consistently since the 1960s, especially in The Greek Concept of Justice (1978) and The Literate Revolution in Greece (1982).

Professor Ong has obviously been encouraged by more thinkers than the preceeding three. However, McLuhan, Lord, and Havelock are the most visible in Ong's discussion of the transformation of the word, the topic that has garnered most of Ong's attention since the 1960s.

The History Of Communication As Stages In Literacy

The year 1967 emerges as an important one in Ong's development. With the release of The Presence of the Word began an excursion into the psycho-cultural implications of the transformation of the word from its initial state of orality on to chirography, typography, and electronics. The reader of the post-1967 output will find no major shifts from pre-1967 works, except for a marked decrease in Ong's polemic writing style (although that change had already begun in the early 1950s). In Presence and in works succeeding it, Ong analyzes the history of verbal communication--which is in essence a typology of cultural evolution--in three parts: oral-aural or auditory culture, visual-literate culture, and secondary oral-electronic culture. The major features of each will be discussed below.

The oral-aural stage is probably the most important since it is at this point that the word is in its natural state of sound. It is also the most difficult stage to discuss since in our world today there exists no cultures which are not touched in some way by writing. Nonetheless, Ong along with Parry/Lord, Havelock and others, have developed the major features of this culture. The major features are dynamism, traditionalism, polemicism, and the structuring of personality.

The dynamic nature of the oral-aural world relates to the environment of sound. In a world without writing, words exist only as sound--existing as they go out of existence. If a word is "missed," there is no way to go back and look it up. Ong thus argues that in the oral-aural world words are not things, but

"events" or happenings.

Because of the difficulties in storing and retrieving knowledge, oral-aural cultures are traditional. All oratory is structured in common themes and formulas due to the fact that these facilitate recall. Thus, any given theme or formula has been used a myriad of times before any individual speaker uses one. The culture does not seek novelty but preservation of the past. This is why the "wise old man" is popular in preliterate societies. He acts as a virtual walking encyclopedia in a culture that cannot "look up" events that happened years ago.

Oral-aural cultures are also intensely polemic in their verbal communication. Polemicism also results from the need to efficiently store and retrieve knowledge. Organizing knowledge in virtue-vice/good-evil polarities becomes a major part of the memory system, as Frances Yates pointed out in depth in The Art Of Memory (1966; another work considered seminal by Ong). Economic and social factors of course play a role in the atmosphere of hostility, and Ong's analysis does not minimize those factors. However, it does suggest that the nature of the word in primary oral form is highly conducive to a hostility that literate cultures rarely experience. In Orality and Literacy (1982), and to a lesser extent in Presence (1967), Ong argues that in American culture, the urban playing of the "dozens"--a verbal slugfest usually occurring between black males, is a good example of polemicism based on oral thought structures. He writes (1982) that ". . . violence in oral art forms is also connected with the structure of orality itself. When all verbal communication must

be by direct word of mouth, involved in the give and take dynamics of sound, interpersonal relations are kept high--both attractions and, even more, antagonisms" (p. 45).

Finally, the oral-aural culture possesses a structuring of personality substantially different than literates'. Here the work of J.C. Carothers (1959), Marvin Opler (1956), and others on the psychiatric and anthropological fronts is important. Their work is important in showing that preliterates do not experience the same kind of "delusional" schizophrenia that is characteristic of literates--they experience much more of an intense anxiety that is expressed outwardly. Orality and Literacy includes a massive bibliography of cross-cultural studies documenting the noetic structure of preliterates. Out of this literature, Ong tackles certain myths that literate cultures have developed about preliterates, especially those concerning intelligence and logic. He argues that because oral verbalization does not follow literate patterns, literates have concluded that such cultures are not intelligent. However, to come to this conclusion, to assume that oral mental processes are ". . . 'crude', is the kind of thinking that for centuries brought scholars to assume falsely that because the Homeric poems are so skillful, they must be basically written compositions" (1982, p. 57). Likewise, the myth exists that preliterates are "illogical" and have trouble establishing causal relationships. Observation indicates that

they [preliterates] know very well that if you push hard on a mobile object, the push causes it to move. What is true is that they cannot organize elaborate

concatenations of causes in the analytic kind of linear sequences which can only be set up with the help of texts (1982, p. 57).

Much more could be said about the nature of oral-aural cultures. Chapter 3 (pp. 31-75) of Orality and Literacy expands the discussion. Enough has been said here to establish contrasts with the visual-literate stage.

The visual-literate stage is characterized by two inventions which move the word from its primary habitat of sound to greater fixity in space: the alphabet and the printing press. The invention of the alphabet provided the most efficient way of achieving the fixity. It created a sense of "order and control" which preliterate cannot conceive of. The sense of order and control is reflected in the fact that alphabetic culture "puts a premium on visualist qualities such as sharp outline and clear-cut sequence" (1967, p. 47). Consequently, this culture is "likely to regard the literal meaning, in the sense of plain or definite meaning, as something altogether wholesome and altogether desirable, and to regard other remote, perhaps more profoundly symbolic meanings with disfavor" (p. 47). This was exactly the trait manifested by Ramus and the New England Puritans, as reported by Miller in the New England Mind (1939). Ramists and Puritans were "logocentric" to the extreme, or held what Ong labeled the "corpuscular epistemology." Both groups believed in a one-to-one relationship between word, thought, and thing--a belief Ong will argue is facilitated by writing.

What helped Ramists and Puritans take this view was the

invention of moveable alphabetic type, what Ong calls the "ultimate locking of sound in space" (1967, p. 47). With typography comes indexing, tables of contents, and other attempts to facilitate visual assimilation of knowledge. Ong finds it significant that all the materials necessary for the invention of typography were around for centuries. He argues that the invention had to wait because it was "part of a widespread reorganization of the sensorium favoring the visual in communication procedures, that is, favoring the visual in association with the use of words" (1967, pp. 49-50).

Chirographic and especially typographic cultures become taken with the concepts of "analysis," "clarity," and "logic." However, it would be a mistake to conclude that the invention of script and then typography eliminated orality. Ong will argue at length (1971; 1977) that it was not until the Romantic movement in the eighteenth century that writing becomes "interiorized" to the point that the written model is thought to be the ideal verbal form. Ong (1964b) has shown how this "typographic bias" was the cause of many critics hostile reactions to Webster's New International Dictionary, third edition. It included, for the first time in a dictionary, slang and other primarily oral expressions. The typographically conditioned mind concludes that writing should govern the way we speak, not vice-versa.

It is too early in the history of electronic culture to elaborate its definitive characteristics. One thing is certain: "the new age into which we have entered has stepped up the oral and aural. Voice, muted by script and print, has come newly

alive" (1967, p. 88). The new stress on the oral-aural, however, cannot disguise the fact that the typographic has been stepped up even more. This feature in itself makes the new orality substantially different than the old.

Part of the difference concerns the notion of "simultaneity." While the oral culture and the electronic maintain a sense of simultaneity--a feeling of being "with it"--they do so for different reasons. According to Ong (1967):

Primitive life is simultaneous in that it has no records, so that its conscious contact with its past is governed by what people talk about . . . But today's simultaneity is not due to absence of records, to the need to keep talking about our conscious possessions acquired in the past in order not to lose them. Rather, it is a simultaneity based on the most massive accumulation of records ever known . . . Compared with that of earlier man, our sense of simultaneity is supercharged, and our reflectiveness supercharges it even more. Moreover, unlike earlier man, we achieve our sense of simultaneity in a sequential fashion (p. 91).

If anything, the nature of the electronic culture accentuates the need to study the preceeding stages in the transformation of the word. To Ong, the imperfections of the word in its natural habitat of sound--specifically impermanence and inaccuracy, could only be overcome by taking on the limitations enforced by print: "objectivity, concern with things as things, quantification, impersonality" (p. 92). In our electronic culture, the question

becomes, "once the word has acquired these new limitations, can it retain its old purity?" (1967, p. 92). Ong believes that it can, but only if we "seek further to understand the nature of the word as word, which involves understanding the word as sound" (1967, p. 92). This is not meant to imply that Ong looks down on writing--quite the opposite. Writing for Ong is necessary for consciousness raising, but we also need to be more fully aware that it is not a simple extension of speech. Writing restructures consciousness.

Rhetorical Age vs. Romantic Age

In Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology (1971), Interfaces of the Word (1977), and Fighting For Life (1981a), Ong has found it convenient to discuss the nature and significance of communications media in terms of their appearance in the rhetorical age and the romantic age. To Ong, all of Western culture was rhetorical until the advent of romanticism. But rhetorical culture was more than the oral-aural culture: ". . . Western culture, after the invention of writing and before the industrial revolution, made a science or 'art' of its orality" (1971, p. 2). In other words, the habits of oral-aural cultures were maintained by chirographic and typographic cultures until those technologies were interiorized. What are the characteristics of the rhetorical age and the romantic age?

The rhetorical age is dominated by the belief that the oration is the model for all communication. Because of the interaction between rhetoric and logic, the age is highly polemic.

Ong believes, following George Boole and others, that formal logic arises out of an attempt to prove that "I am right, you are wrong"--thus its roots are rhetorical. The age relies on, and respects, the use of "commonplaces" for composing. Formulary devices and commonplaces are necessary in the primary oral world due to information retrieval problems. They remain after writing, even getting stronger because print made for easy accumulation of books of commonplaces (Ong, 1965; 1971). This is why Ong argues that new media do not eliminate older practices--they initially reinforce and reinvigorate them. People probably talked more after the invention of writing, just as electronic culture writes more than the typographic.

The romantic age, on the other hand, which we are still in, values "originality" as opposed to commonplaces. According to Ong, the romantic movement's chief characteristics are "a preoccupation with otherness, with what is different, remote, mysterious, inaccessible, exotic, even bizarre" (1971, p. 255). Ong shows how early romanticists, like Coleridge and Wordsworth, put themselves in direct opposition to the commonplace, rhetorical tradition. Romanticism represents the full "interiorization" of writing and print. The late eighteenth century found itself suddenly with access to more information than prior cultures could gain hold of and thus began searching for the "novel." Commonplaces became a sign of shallow thought processes. As the title of an Ong essay puts it, the move from rhetorical age to romantic age is the move "From Mimesis to Irony" (1977). When the Romantic age does imitiate, it usually does it with a touch of

irony.

The argument that ours is still the romantic age is crucial to understanding why Ong does not view the contemporary revival of orality, through television, radio, and the rest, as a return to the rhetorical age. On the surface, the new orality and the old appear similar: television gives the kind of "simultaneity" that oral cultures experience, programmers use formulas that are tried and true, and our world is certainly event filled.

However, contemporary orality is extraordinarily touched by writing and print, thus Ong's term for the new orality is "secondary orality." Ong posits that the world of secondary orality is "superficially identical with that of primary orality but in depth utterly contrary, planned and self-conscious where primary orality is unplanned and unselfconscious, [secondary orality is] totally dependent on writing and print for its existence" (1977, p. 298). Electronic media have an "aura" of spontaneity about them. Political talk shows, which pretend to be the most spontaneous electronic programs around, have been shown in an entertaining article (Hitchens, 1987) to be fixed and "rigged." Hitchens relates his experiences of appearing on these programs and being subject to intense pre-preparation to make sure everything would go well on the program. Hardly the kind of spontaneity known to Homer's Greece.

Other differences between secondary and primary orality are that the former do not need to use formulaic devices to aid recall, rather they function as a "focal point for elaborate analytic work. Such for example might be 'clear and present

danger'" (1971, p. 247). Advertisers use formulas as slogans, catchphrases, and jingles--obviously not what primary oral culture formulas were used as.

Although much too brief, enough has been said here to indicate that Ong sees the rhetorical and romantic ages not as isolated entities, but interacting stages of cultural evolution. Rhetoric mirrors the evolution of society and plays a role in shaping culture as it is shaped by cultural developments. In order to understand the current nature and function of rhetoric, we need to understand how it functioned in primary orality and then changed through the transformation of the word through script and print. Ong argues that "the ancient rhetoricians were the first media buffs. Study of the rhetorical tradition enables us to interpret the past on its own terms and thus to discover many of the real roots out of which the present grows" (1971, p. viii).

Conclusions

Ong wrote in The Presence of the Word that "oral culture does not produce a Descarte or Newton or Einstein" (p. 231). The kind of abstract theorizing represented by these theorists is not possible without writing. Therefore, the oral culture does not produce a Walter Ong or any other person touched by writing. That is the most basic of Ong's insights, one on which the others hinge. Unless one accepts Ong's assumptions that writing is a technology that restructures consciousness (1982; 1985), then his other conclusions may be problematical. Ong reports in personal conversation that philosophers, more than any other group, are

unwilling to accept this proposition. He says that they refuse to see their field as a technological product made possible by writing.

While philosophers might not find Ong relevant, rhetoricians should. This is so for several reasons to be mentioned here, though more could be derived if there were space.

First, Professor Ong, although not known as a rhetorician, probably fits that label more than most. As his work is fundamentally a "phenomenological history of culture and consciousness," (1977, p. 10), he has been called a cultural critic, a psycho-cultural historian, an anthropologist, and many other labels. But if by rhetorician we still mean what Cicero would have meant by that term--one who aspires to knowledge in all fields--then Ong is probably more of a rhetorician than those who give themselves the title. The field of rhetoric is reaching the point, and has been moving towards it for some time, where it has trouble ignoring findings from other fields. Winterowd (1973) criticized the Wingspread Conference on Rhetoric (released as The Prospect of Rhetoric, eds. Lloyd Bitzer and Edwin Black, 1971) for neglecting too many other disciplines in its findings on the status of rhetoric. More recently, Richard B. Gregg's review (1987) of Cherwitz and Hikins' Communication and Knowledge: An Investigation In Rhetorical Knowledge (1986), faults the authors for turning to, in their "veneration of science," a "limited philosophical perspective, rather than to the sciences of physiology, neurophysiology, and biology, or the social science findings of cognitive psychology or anthropology to buttress their

claims" (1987, p. 235). The point is that Ong has been conducting his research for years in a manner we are now in many respects demanding. He has contributed intensely to the breakdown of the "wall of separation" that exists between all fields and his works are an excellent introduction to major findings in those fields.

A second area of relevance concerns Ong's distinction between synchronic and diachronic research. Synchronic research compares cultures that coexist at a given period of time. Diachronic research proceeds historically, comparing successive eras with one another. Ong argues that synchronic research is a relatively recent phenomenon, made possible by the modern ease with which it is possible to gather information. Synchronic research is valuable and necessary, but

diachronic study of orality and literacy and of the various stages in the evolution from one to the other sets up a frame of reference in which it is possible to understand better not only pristine oral culture, but also the print culture that brings writing to a new peak and the electronic culture which builds on both writing and print. In this diachronic framework, past and present, Homer and television can illuminate one another (1982, p. 2).

Because of Ong's diachronic focus, he has offered insights into the nature of ancient, Renaissance and contemporary rhetoric that might have gone otherwise unnoticed. He has shown how rhetoric virtually governed all expression until the romantic era--and how it still persists in the electronic culture. But more important

than the insights he may have provided, he seems to set an example which suggests that we cannot afford not to be diachronic. A purely synchronic approach to contemporary rhetorical theory would leave us vulnerable to the typographic biases Ong talks about. It would seem that the establishment of the International Society For The History Of Rhetoric in 1977 was a recognition that there is a profound need for diachronic study of rhetoric if it is to be given full contemporary meaning.

A final reason for Ong's relevance to be discussed here falls directly out of the first two and concerns the value of his work as a "metarhetoric." In a 1971 article, James J. Murphy argued that "metarhetoric is the counterpart of epistemology. Metarhetoric investigates what a rhetorician needs to know in order to be a rhetorician" (p. 202). In his study, Murphy explored the metarhetorical dimensions in Plato, Augustine, and McLuhan--showing how each developed "first principles" which make a rhetoric possible. A principle derivable from Mcluhan, for example, is that "any understanding of social and cultural change is impossible without a knowledge of the way media work as environments." Imbedded in Ong's work are numerous metarhetorical principles. Two derivable from the ideas presented in this paper are:

1. Rhetoric may only be given fuller meaning by relating it to larger cultural developments; the rhetorician must show how rhetoric influences and is influenced by cultural practices.
2. A theory of rhetoric is not possible without knowledge of the way the word has presented itself historically in orality,

script, print, and electronics.

The idea for this research on the thought of Professor Ong originally arose from an observation that Ong is conspicuously absent from textbooks treating theorists influential to rhetoric (i.e. Douglas, 1973; Johannesen, 1971; Foss, Foss, and Trapp, 1985). This introduction to Ong's thought, in showing how a concern with rhetorical practice enters into most of his work, suggests that Ong deserves a place among the prominent rhetorical theorists of the twentieth century.

Notes

1 At this coming November's Speech Communication Association Convention in Boston, there will be a panel presented entitled The Heritage and the Promise of Walter J. Ong. Participants will include Bruce Gronbeck ("Walter J. Ong's Contributions to Twentieth-Century Rhetorical and Communication Theory"); Frank Dance ("Theories of Media: Ong's Formulation of Orality and Literacy"); Anthony Palmeri (The Pre-Ramus Bases of the Thought of Walter J. Ong, S.J."); and David Payne ("The Decay of Dialogue and the Characterological Quest in Rhetorical Theory"). Also, Professor Gronbeck is currently editing a series of essays written by various scholars which will focus on issues raised by Ong. A tape of Ong's lecture to the recent joint meeting of the Central States and Southern Speech Associations, titled "The Transformation of Orality," is also available. Write the organization Acts, Inc., 1025 E. Clayton Rd., Ballwin, MO 63011 for information on receiving the tape. Or call them at (314) 394-0611. Finally, the next issue of the journal Oral Tradition will be a Festschrift for Ong. It probably will contain a near complete bibliography of Ong's works.

2 Ong's thoughts on the New Criticism deserve fuller treatment in a longer study. For the major features of his argument, see his "The Jinnee in the Well-Wrought Urn," Essays In Criticism, 4, (July 1954): 309-320; "Voice as Summons for Belief: Literature, Faith, and the Divided Self," Thought, 33, (Spring 1958): 43-61; "A Dialectic of Aural and Objective Correlatives," Essays In Criticism, 8, (April 1958): 166-181; and "The Vernacular

Matrix of the New Criticism," in The Critical Matrix. Ed. Paul R. Sullivan, Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1961, pp. 3-35.

3 See "Reporting Providence," Commonweal, 45, (24 June 1947): 367-369; "Kafka's Castle in the West," Thought, 22, (September 1947): 439-460; "Myth and the Cabalas: Adventures in the Unspoken," Modern Schoolman, 27, (March 1950): 169-183; "Psyche and Geometers: Aspects of Associationist Critical Theory," Modern Philology, 49, (August 1951): 16-27; "Peter Ramus and the Naming of Methodism: Medieval Science Through Ramist Homiletic," Journal of the History of Ideas, 14, (April 1953): 235-248; "Ramus: Rhetoric and the Pre-Newtonian Mind," in English Institute Essays 1952, ed. Alan S. Downer. New York: Columbia University Press, 1952, pp138-170; "Swift on the Mind: The Myth of Asepsis," Modern Language Quarterly, 15, (September 1954): 208-221; "Metaphor and the Twinned Vision: The Phoenix and the Turtle," Sewanee Review, 63, (Spring 1955): 193-201; "Grammar Today: 'Structure' in a Vocal World," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 43, (December 1957): 399-407.

--These studies all reflect, in varying degree and detail, Ong's "discovery" that much could be gained by acknowledging the differences between auditory and visual approaches to knowledge.

4 The journal Oral Tradition, beginning in 1966 (Slavica Publishers, P.O. Box 14388, Columbus, Ohio, 43214; John Miles Foley, ed.), has devoted itself to studies dealing with issues involved in orality. Anyone interested in this area should consult this journal.

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